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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly discusses the rationale for and importance of establishing effective communication between parents and their children and between parents and schools. Five steps parents can take to develop positive communication with their children are outlined, and 14 general communication guidelines for carrying out a successful parent/teacher conferences are discussed. (MP)

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PARENT PARTICIPATION PROMOTES PROGRESS

By
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The Need For A Partnership Between The School And Home:

Parents are the child's first teachers. They instill attitudes and values, teach morals, promote social development, teach basic language patterns, serve as disciplinarian, and exert many other important influences upon the child. Because of the importance of the early years, parents are the most important teachers the child will ever know (Patterson and Read, 1980).

Those who work with young children have long realized the need for cooperation from parents in the education of their child. Traditionally, the school and the home have worked closely through the cooperation of the teachers and parents (Suchara, 1982). When the child enters school for the first time, this represents a major change in life styles for parents as well as children. An instant bond and mutual interest is developed, thus creating a unique responsibility for the home and school. Parental suggestions, advice, and involvement is welcomed in most school systems (McGuire, 1981)

Helping children learn and grow is a fascinating and fulfilling experience for parents and teachers. Each child has special interests and talents that both the home and the school can appreciate and that both must encourage in order for a child to reach full potential. It is logical that parents and teachers should develop a joint partnership since the school and the parents share mutual goals for the progress of the child (Robbins and Short, 1979).

Parents are a teacher's most important resource in reinforcing what the school wants the child to learn (Croft, 1979). Teachers have a deep appreciation for the efforts of parents in the education of children. One teacher's response to cooperation and support from parents included: "I feel a sense of elation and pride when I see the power we have in creating optional learning experiences for the children and ourselves. I am convinced that the only way to be effective in educating young people is through collaboration of parents and teachers (Croft, 1979)."

Parent Communication With The Child:

Developing positive communication skills with the child is one of the most valuable contributions parents can make to the child's life. Parents should begin to think about how best to communicate with the child very soon after the

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child's birth. Beginning positive communications at a very young age builds trust and confidence and lays a foundation for dealing with important topics as the child grows older. If this relationship is not developed early, communications with the child later will be difficult or impossible. Adolescents often need a receptive adult to communicate with about such issues as alcohol and drugs, peer pressure, religious concerns, contraceptives, and other such areas that they are confronted with.

Statistical data reveals evidence of a lack of communication in the home (Newsweek, 1975).

(1) One child in nine will appear in juvenile court before the age of eighteen.
(2) Each year, one million children, most from middle-class families, run away from home.
(3) Child abuse is a serious public health problem; thus, parents evidence frustrations about their children.
(4) Suicide is the second leading cause of death among American 15-24 age group.

A few step parents can take in developing positive communication with children include:

(1) Begin with very young children in developing common areas of interest that can be shared over years in the relationship. These may include hobbies, books, movies, foods, people, pets, or any other interest.
(2) Be timely in your talks. Do not broach other problems when one problem is already being discussed.
(3) Do not tell the child more than the child wants to hear. Young children need simple, to the point, explanations. Usually if the child is not satisfied with the explanation, more questioning will be pursued.
(4) Let your child know that you were once a child too. You have experienced some of the same problems the child is experiencing. Share these experiences and how you dealt with them and whether your actions proved right or wrong.
(5) Encourage your child to level with you and be truthful without fear of punishment or disapproval. Parents need to remember life is not composed of only good judgements and decisions. Everyone is entitled to mistakes. Learning from the mistakes is the important outgrowth.

Parent Communication With The School:

The key to successful cooperation between parents and the school is the willingness on the part of each group to accept the sincere interest and good intentions and competence of the other (Andrews, 1981). Parent-teacher communications are more likely to be successful if based on a common goal of the child's welfare (Croft, 1979). Some general communication guidelines for parent-teacher conferences include:

(1) Do not wait until the teacher calls you in for

a conference. Parents should initiate conferences to discuss any concern they may have.

(2) Do give the teacher adequate notice for arranging for a conference. Parents should give the teacher an idea of what topics they wish to discuss. This allows the teacher to collect supportive papers and data concerning those topics. These materials serve as supportive resources and better clarify information about the child.

(3) Do initially in the conference convey to the teacher your willingness to establish a positive relationship and a desire to cooperate in your child's education. A team effort is vital for progress.

(4) Do plan for both parents, if possible, to attend the conference. The child is not just mother's child. Conferences are both parent's responsibility. The child is aware that both parents are participating in the school support. After the conference, two parents can more effectively discuss individual concepts of what the teacher had to say and unite to begin remedial work on deficiencies.

(5) Do consider if it would be beneficial for your child to attend the conference. Often it is desirable for the child to be a participant in the conference. Parent-teacher-child confrontations can be productive. Each can offer personal accounts relative to issues under discussion.

(6) Do, at the beginning of the conference, establish some specific criteria as to what is to be accomplished during the conference. This gives purpose and direction for the time available.

(7) Do strive for equal authority in your role as a parent. Conferences are partnerships, equal relationships where neither teacher nor parent is subservient.

(8) Do strive for a balance in listening and talking during the conference. Positive communications require both.

(9) Do anticipate some discussion from the teacher relative to the child's deficiencies. Accept these constructively and as a beginning for remediation. Every child has areas that need strengthening and if the teacher says otherwise, the child may not be challenged in the school work.

(10) Do anticipate some discussion from the teacher relative to your child's strengths. If none surface during the talk, ask what strengths your child possesses. All children have assets and these serve as foundations in learning. Teachers are so trained in remediation techniques that often expressing strengths is overlooked.

(11) Do share with the teacher any important and relevant accounts you have of situations. Two heads are better than one.

(12) Do not feel you are an unsuccessful parent if you are not perfect. The teacher is not perfect either. Both teacher and parent learn from mistakes and are apt to win a few and lose a few.

(13) Do not feel you have to agree with all the teacher's comments and decisions. Expressing differences can be done in a positive manner.

(14) Do not stay long at a conference if the teacher appears to be exhausted, upset, or unsure of the situation. A good time to leave may be when productivity ceases. If you have not communicated all you had hoped to or had some points communicated to you that you had anticipated, try to set up another conference in a few days.

Summary:

The effectiveness of parent-teacher participation depends on good communications. Parents first of all need to establish effective communications with the child. This process should begin when the child is very young. Parent-teacher communications are most effective when each views the other's goal as one of good intent and beneficial to the child.

The future for today's children lies primarily in the relationship the school and the home can provide. Jesse Jackson, the notable black leader of our day aptly stated:

> "Parents must make room in their hearts and then in their house and then in thier schedule for their children. No poor parent is too poor to do that, and no middle-class parent is too busy (Croft, 1979)."

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